SCOTTISH LAY PREACHERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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One of the most insistent demands being made by almost every church at the present time is that laymen shall be more completely involved in the total mission of the church. The growing alienation of what are called "the working classes", and the acute shortage of candidates for the ministry, have served to emphasise this need. At the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Evanston in August 1954, the apostolate of the laity was a prominent theme for discussion. It was concluded that "the Church must rediscover the original meaning of the word 'Laity'—that 'laity' in the New Testament signifies the 'people' of God as a corporate whole. Clergy and laity *together* are the missionary people of God. . . . The functions of the minister and the layman differ within the household of faith, but neither is exempt from the call to spread the Gospel".

"Tell Scotland", *the* widely-discussed movement within the land at the present day, has for its immediate aim: "To recruit and train the lay forces of the Church for the task of witness through congregational groups". This is a modern attempt to adopt the technique and encourage the spirit of the Societies for Prayer which played so notable a part in the religious life of the eighteenth century.

From the very earliest post-Reformation days, the layman was given a distinctive place in the leadership of the Christian community in Scotland. On 7th July 1557, John Knox wrote to his brethren from the Continent a letter which was to be circulated in the places where he had preached: "And thairfoir, deir brethrene, yf that you luke for a lyfe to cum, of necessitie it is that ye exercise yourselves in the buke of the Lord your God, Lat na day slip over without sum comfort ressavit fra the mouth of God". They were to be bishops in their own homes, and their families were their charge . . . "thairfoir ye must mak thame partakeris in reading, exhortation, and in making commoun prayeris".[1] The brethren were to assemble once a week "than lat sum place of scripture be planelie and distinctlie red . . . whilk endit, gif any brother have exhortation, interpretation, or dout, lat him not feir to speik and move the same, sa that he do it with moderatioun, either to edifie or be edifeit". In his *Liturgy* he advised the weekly assembling of the Congregation to hear

[1] McCrie, *Life of John Knox* (1884 ed.), pp. 349/352.

some portion of the Scriptures expounded. "At the which time it is lawful for every man to speak or enquire as God shall move his heart and the text minister occasion". In the *First Book of Discipline*, the speakers at the Weekly Exercise were to "the number of three", but he added, "and every man shall have liberty to utter and declare his minde and knowledge to the comfort and consolation of the Kirk".[1]

In the bitter struggle to establish the first Reformation in Scotland, "at that tyme we had na publict ministeris of the worde; onlie did certane zelous men . . . exhorte thare brethrein, according to the giftes and graces granted unto thame". Of the five men singled out by name, four at least were laymen.[2] Thus the principle of the priesthood of all believers began to find expression in the public exposition of the Scriptures, although this was to be a teaching, rather than a preaching office.

As time went by, the lay-elder became more and more taken up with government, a ruling rather than a teaching vocation, although the days of persecution in the seventeenth century revived again the small fellowship meeting, with its lay ministry within the Societies for Prayer. During this same century, the saintly Thomas Hog of Kiltearn (b. 1628) inspired that ecclesiastically unofficial, but religiously significant order of evangelical laymen, known as "The Men", a religious aristocracy which was to play so large a part in Highland evangelical history. These "Men" were raised to full status usually by being asked to pray, and then to "Speak to the question" at a congregational fellowship meeting. If his gifts seemed adequate, such a man was numbered among the Friday speakers during communion seasons.[3] This is the nearest approach in Scotland to the order of itinerant preachers established in England by John Wesley during the eighteenth century.

Other lay preaching in Scotland during the seventeenth century arose from the presence of the occupying army of the Commonwealth who were stationed at key towns. Many of the soldiers were Baptists and toleration was in vogue. At Leith, Major-General Lillburne, who commanded the English army, was a Baptist, as was General Overton, the governor at Perth. Under their protection, many converts were made and Baptist Churches founded. But when the Protectorate army left Scotland on New Year's Day 1660, many of the leading members were withdrawn, and Anabaptists, Quakers and Fifth Monarchy Men were banned by the First Scots Parliament of Charles II (Jan. 1661).

[1] *First and Second Book of Discipline*, "Prophecying," p. 61.

[2] Knox, *Works*, ed. Laing, vol. i, p. 300.

[3] McInnes, *Evangelical Movements in the Highlands of Scotland*, 1688-1800, pp. 211 ff.

It was not until Sir William Sinclair of Dunbeath settled at Keiss in Caithness, on assuming his title, that we have more Baptist lay-preaching. As a soldier, he had probably met Baptists whilst on military service in England. He preached to his neighbours and formed a church on New Year's Day 1750, to the great annoyance of the surrounding gentry. In 1762, Bishop Robert Forbes visited him, sneering at this "preaching knight. . . . A wrong-headed man confessedly by all who knew him best, for he has taken up that oddway of strolling about and preaching without commission or appointment of any man or any set of men whatsoever".[1]

It was Sir William who prepared and published, in 1751, a collection of 60 *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* of his own composition for the use of the little church. Julian maintains that this was almost the first hymn-book produced in Scotland for a Protestant congregation. The hymns are not of any special merit but indicate a man filled with praise. The local parish minister reported that there was not "any sort of outrage, wildness or violence in its professors".[2] Sinclair died in Dec. 1768.

When the "Scotch Baptists" emerged in 1765, meeting at the Cowgate, Edinburgh, lay-preaching appeared too; one of their founders and leaders was Archibald McLean, a printer and book-seller in Glasgow, who settled in Edinburgh as Corrector of the Press in Messrs. Donaldson's printing establishment. In 1783, Henry David Inglis, grandson of Colonel Gardiner who fell at Prestonpans, and an advocate by profession, was set apart by the Baptist Church at Edinburgh to preach in the surrounding towns and villages, which he did two or three times a week after he had completed his daily duties.

Such activities met with widespread public disapproval. The work of preaching was the special province of the ordained minister, and it was near blasphemy to think of any other "wagging his pow" in the pulpit. Earnest and gifted men within the Church of Scotland used their talents within the Church Courts and the Societies for Prayer.

The Cambuslang revival broke out on 18th February 1742, in the third of a series of weekly lectures given on Thursday evenings by the minister, the Rev. William McCulloch. He had been persuaded to this new venture by two of his elders, Robert Bowman, a weaver, and Ingram More, a shoemaker, who had carried a petition to this end from door to door through the parish. It was signed by almost half of the total households in Cambuslang. During the following months, these two laymen and many others from far and near, especially Sergeant Forbes of Edin-

[1] Forbes, *Journals*, ed. Craven, p. 207.
[2] *Old Stat. Acc.*, x, 7.

burgh, were kept busy guiding, advising and teaching the thousands who journeyed to Cambuslang. All of which was getting very near to public lay-preaching.

Within the Church of Scotland, apart from "the Men", the missionaries, catechists and schoolmasters of the S.S.P.C.K. often served as ministers in their functions of preaching and teaching. Dugald Buchanan (1716/1768), the greatest of all Gaelic religious poets, was one of these, and he was greatly influenced by the revival movement which spread from Cambuslang. Schoolmaster at Rannoch, he "was in the habit of addressing all who chose to hear him". Others there were less-known. In Prince's *Christian History*, 1744, printed at Boston, New England, there is a letter "from two eminent Booksellers in the City of Edinburgh to the Reverend Mr. Moorhead", dated Feb. 10, 1743, 4, which reads:

"There is one Parish in the remote Highlands . . . the greatest Bounds of any in Scotland (for the Extent of it including Isles Etc. is said to be above 100 Miles in Circumference). . . . They have now no Minister; but their School-master, who is a pious Man, has travel'd amongst them, and instructed them to a great Degree; so that from 6 years of Age to 80 . . . great Numbers are thirsting after the Knowledge of God. . . . They have formed Societies in sundry Places; according as their Contiguity does best Answer for their Meetings. There they pray, sing Psalms, and instruct one another. Their School-master goes round them; so that through the Year, he is not a Sabbath of ten at his own House. His Presbytery . . . allows him to explain the Scriptures he reads . . . he calls also on the People to give their own Thoughts on sundry Passages of Scripture. . . . The Name of this extended Parish is Lochbroom, and the Name of the School-master is Mr. Hugh Cameron,

Tho. Lumisden
Jo. Robertson."

So throughout the century, noble work was being done by zealous and gifted laymen with the S.S.P.C.K., but it was always in the nature of a stop-gap measure, an emergency which had to be met by any available means, however unusual. It was something approaching presumption for the Scottish laymen to venture on the work of preaching in Scotland. But although ecclesiastical *amour-propre* and popular opinion afforded scant opportunity for lay-preaching in Scotland, there were growing privileges available in the south. The leaders in what eventually became the Evangelical Revival, and their many doings, became household words in Scotland through the pages of the fashionable *Scots Magazine*.

John Wesley, described by Leslie Stephen as "the greatest captain of men of his century", burst upon his contemporaries in the eighteenth

century. In his power to command men, to see clearly essential strategy and to modify theory in the wisdom taught by experience, he has been well compared with a later descendant of a collateral branch of the same family, the Duke of Wellington. In the summer of 1738, he visited the Moravian community at Herrnhut, and was deeply impressed by both their fellowship and organisation, with open-air preaching, and preaching laymen. Especially did he cherish his association with the Moravian mechanic and lay-preacher, Christian David, who was "as an angel" unto him.

About this time there were several laymen who began, spontaneously, to preach in several places, organising "rounds" of Societies which they visited from time to time. It is very probable that the practice of testimony and scriptural exhortation in the religious societies had revealed aptitudes and whetted appetites for wider ministry.

In 1735, the saintly Howell Harris (b. 1714), thrice denied episcopal ordination because of his evangelical zeal, became the very word of God to his native Wales; he met John Wesley in 1739, making a great impression upon him. On 14th June 1739, another lay associate of Wesley's, John Cennick (1718/1755), standing with a group of Kingswood colliers waiting for a young man from Bristol to come and read to them a sermon, was himself urged to public exhortation when the appointed preacher failed to appear.[1] Wesley was requested to forbid him, but he in fact encouraged him to persevere; Cennick was probably the first Methodist lay-preacher.

Later towards the end of that same year, while Wesley was away from London, Thomas Maxfield, urged on by Lady Huntingdon to use his gifts, began to preach at Wesley's London headquarters, the Foundery. The angry clergyman hurried back to put a stop to this sinful irregularity but his mother restrained him. "John . . . you cannot suspect me of favouring readily anything of this kind. But take care what you do with respect to that young man; for he is as truly called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching and hear him also yourself."

Ever deferential to her judgment, and acquiescing in this logical plea, Wesley did so and confessed "It is the Lord". By 1744, forty such lay-preachers were at work and Wesley had written his *Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, pointing out that our Lord was a Carpenter, a layman. "If we come to later times, was Mr. Calvin ordained? Was he either priest or deacon?"[2] Also in that same year, Wesley called his

[1] J. Wesley, *Journal*, Standard Edition, ii, 228.
[2] L. Tyerman, *Life of Iohn Wesley*, i, 370.

fellow-preachers to conference with himself. The two Wesley brothers and four clergymen of the Church of England met for prayer; then "it was inquired whether any of our lay brethren should be present . . . and it was agreed to invite some". Four laymen "were accordingly brought in". During their deliberations, they approved Wesley's suggested "The Rules of a Helper", one of the most significant and formative documents of Methodist history. There were twelve rules in all, and the standard set forward was far from easy of attainment. Thus :—

"1. Be diligent. Never be unemployed a moment. Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time. . . .

5. Believe evil of no one, unless you see it done, take heed how you credit it. Put the best construction on everything. . . .

8. Do not affect the gentleman. You have no more to do with this character, than with that of a dancing-master. A Preacher of the Gospel is the servant of all.

9. Be ashamed of nothing but sin: not of fetching wood (if time permit) or drawing water: not of cleaning your own shoes, or your neighbour's.

11. You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore, spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most. . . . You will need all the sense you have, and to have all your wits about you".

Here indeed was sound and sanctified commonsense !

In May 1755, sixty-three such preachers met in conference at Leeds. "After a free and full debate", they decided that they ought not "to separate from the Established Church". At the close of the Conference, Wesley challenged his fellow preachers, clergy and laity alike, with his abrupt and incisive questions, amongst which were :—

"Which of you drinks water ? Why not ?
Who rises at four ? Why not ?
Who has not four meals a day ?
Who, never on any account, disappoints a Congregation ?
Who preaches the old thundring doctrine ?
Who is never idle ?
Is your heart Whole in the work ?
Who will join Heart and Hand, according to the twelve rules ? "

Amongst those who heard, and approved, was a twenty-two years old Scot, Alexander Mather, a man who was to remain in closest friendship

with Wesley until the latter's death, thirty-six years later. He was one of several Scots who rendered invaluable service to the Great Itinerant in his ceaseless evangelising, and three of them, namely, Duncan Wright (1736-1791), Alexander Mather (1733-1800), and Thomas Rankin (1738-1810), deserve special mention. Each of them set down his own story at John Wesley's request.

Duncan Wright was born in May, 1736, at Fortingal, Breadalbane, Perthshire, but removed to Edinburgh with his parents when very young. Having several kinsmen in the army, he enlisted when eighteen years of age in the Tenth Regiment of Foot, and was stationed in Ireland. In 1755, when encamped near Cashell, he heard "William Coventry, a corporal in the Royal Scotch", preach on several occasions. Wright fell readily into the habits of his fellow soldiers, but was saved from many grosser excesses by his love of reading. "I bought or borrowed all the playes, novels and romances I could lay my hands upon; reading late and early". He borrowed from another soldier *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, and its dialogue form attracted him greatly. Before he had read it half way through, he realised his need of Christ.

Amid the difficulties of a military routine and among 700 other soldiers, he began to practise religious habits. Discovering a society of Methodists in Limerick, he joined them for the watch-night service in the last minutes of 1755. It was in the following summer that he first heard John Wesley preach; soon he was himself to be thrust out into the work of preaching.

In 1758, Government resolved to tighten up army discipline by shooting one deserter in every city and a young man of twenty-two from Derbyshire, Joseph Newton, was chosen for execution in Limerick. Wright finally overcame his nervousness and visited the unfortunate prisoner in the public guard-house, and spoke to him of religion; the man went to his execution with great calm and dignity. From this small beginning, Wright went on to form a society of Methodists and preached to them. Promoted to sergeant, he was not put forward for a commission "as I made myself so ridiculous". Nor was his task any easier by the perpetual drunkenness of the chaplain to the regiment.

Although he was brought into a low state of health "by preaching loud and long, and by reading at all hours", yet by the end of 1764 he ventured on the rigorous life of a Methodist itinerat preacher. Through many hazards and hardships, Wright continued to preach in Ireland, in spite of the many disorders arising from the Roman Catholic Whiteboys. Then for two years he travelled, despite uncertain health, with John Wesley through the three Kingdoms.

In 1769, along with another lay preacher, Alexander McNab, and at the special request of Wesley, he began to try to preach in Erse to the "poor Highlanders" who had come to the larger towns, although he himself had but a smattering of the language. At Perth he was so impressed by the need of such a ministry that he "bought a New Testament in the modern Gaelic" and progressed so well that by Christmas time he preached to the Highlanders in their own tongue, though he "was often obliged to break off and address the people in English". Yet in less than four years, he was able to officiate for two hours together without a word of English. Wright asserts that this "was by far the most delightful work I ever had", though it was most exacting. As a typical day's work, he preached in English at Greenock at seven in the morning, then spent two hours from ten to twelve with the Highlanders; he walked to Port Glasgow and preached in the streets at four, then the walk back to Greenock to preach at six, followed by a meeting of the society.

His sterling worth commended him to Wesley's confidence, and on Nov. 24th 1781, Wesley requested him to "accept the key of the book-room and immediately take the books into your own care".[1] Since the book-room was one of Wesley's greatest concerns, this was high honour indeed. Duncan Wright also concerned himself with the work of the Sunday Schools, another development greatly loved by Wesley. In August 1787, and April 1788, Wesley visited Bolton, Lancs., and remarked on the eight hundred poor children who were taught there "by about eighty masters, who receive no pay but what they are to receive from their Great Master". On 9th Jan. he wrote:

> "Dear Duncan,
>
> I cannot doubt but a blessing redounds to you all for the sake of the poor children. I verily think these Sunday Schools are one of the noblest specimens of charity which have been set on foot in England since the time of William the Conqueror".[2]

In the winter of 1790, Duncan Wright contracted disease in his lungs, struggled through the winter with great difficulty, and at John Wesley's funeral, March 9th, 1791, affirmed that he would probably be the next to go. And so it was, for two months later he passed away at the age of fifty-four, after twenty-seven years as a Methodist preacher, and was interred in John Wesley's vault behind the chapel in City-road, London.[3]

On 16th Nov. 1769, John Wesley wrote to John Liden, Professor of History at Lund, Sweden, who had encountered the Methodists during a

[1] J. Wesley, *Letters*, Standard Edition, vii, 94. [2] *Ibid.*, viii, 34.

[3] *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, ed. Thomas Jackson, ii, 107-130. (1866 Edition.)

visit to England earlier in that year, answering some of his questions. Among other things, he noted: "I believe some of the best preachers are—and he names fifteen in all—Alex. Mather . . . Duncan Wright . . . Alexander McNab. Each of these preachers has his food where he labours, and twelve pounds a year for clothes and other expenses. If he is married, he has ten pounds a year for his wife".[1] And so, provided with a horse and a pair of saddle-bags containing Bible, Hymn Book and wardrobe, these itinerant preachers rode far and wide throughout the land.

Alexander Mather became one of the outstanding leaders of early Methodism, a man of cool judgment and sound, trustworthy commonsense. As his friend, the Rev. Joseph Benson, said in his funeral oration: "No person has been more universally respected among us". A fervent and successful evangelist, his iron constitution enabled him to undertake long journeys on bad roads in all sorts of weather, and his unsparing labours astonished his fellow-preachers. Said one: "He rushed through every open door, and was instrumental in opening not a few". Often he preached four or five times daily, although he had to overcome a serious natural defect in his speech, which, by care and perseverance, he achieved.

Mather tells us that he was born in February 1733, into a pious home at Brechin but, while still a boy, he encountered serious dangers and hardships. As a childish frolic, he joined himself to a party of rebels during the '45, and found himself at Culloden heath where "many mighty ones fell". Returning home, his father would not receive him, and it was only through the persistence of his mother that he reached relatives in Perth, being almost drowned whilst crossing the Tay. They had travelled through a countryside "full of horse and foot searching for strangers", hiding in straw at a poor man's cottage *en route*. Following a day's rest at his uncle's, he was hurried over the mountains elsewhere, then off again. After a long time as a fugitive, he returned home, and suffered the indignity not merely of a closed door, but of his own father handing him over to the military. Only the entreaties of friends procured his release from custody. In later years when his aged father was reduced to poverty by his own imprudence, his son was able and willing to help him.

Mather set sail for London in June 1752, held several unsatisfactory situations, and then hired himself, in 1753, as a journeyman with a baker, Mr. Marriott, whose wife had been one of the original twelve members of Wesley's first society at the Foundery. After hearing Wesley preach at West Street Chapel, London, on 14th April 1754, he was converted, and threw his great energies into the work.

[1] J. Wesley, *Letters*, v, 155.

When he told Wesley of his desire to become an itinerant preacher, he was warned: "To be a Methodist preacher . . . is a life of much labour and reproach. They often fare hard, often are in want. They are liable to be stoned, beaten and abused. . . . Consider this". So he began as a local preacher around London, while still following his trade. He gives us a graphic picture of life at this time.

"In a little while, I was more employed than my strength would well allow. I had no time for preaching, but what I took from my sleep, so that I had frequently not eight hours of sleep in a week. This, with hard labour, constant abstemiousness and frequent fasting, brought me low". He outlines a typical day. After finishing business, he hurried home in a sweat, changed his clothes, and ran off to preach at a chapel. Then the walk, or run (if he had preached too long) back home, into working clothes again, and at the bakery for 10 p.m. where he wrought all night. As John Wesley enjoined on all his preachers, Mather would preach at five the next morning, then run back to draw the bread from the oven at a quarter or half past six. Then hard work in the bakehouse till eight o'clock, followed by hurrying out with the bread until afternoon. If Isaac Watts be true that Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do, here was a most discouraging subject!

Becoming a travelling preacher, Mather left London on 15th August 1757, to walk the 150 miles to his first charge at Epworth. In that same Autumn, he moved to Boston in South Lincolnshire, where he was badly stoned, beaten and pelted with filth. "It was a full year before I recovered." Journeying north to Nottingham, he gained access to a condemned, demented felon who was to die the next day, and walked beside him to the place of execution singing "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise".

In 1758, he returned to his home-town of Brechin and was ill in bed for a month with haemorrhage. Mr. Blair, the local minister, showed him much kindness, visiting him often, giving him a token for the communion and inviting him to the manse where he asked for, and received, a full account of the Methodists. He received John Wesley with equal kindness six years later.

For almost forty years after this, Mather preached throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom, often meeting danger, difficulty and violent persecutions. It was to him that John Wesley wrote on 6th August 1777: "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell, and set up the kingdom

of heaven upon earth".[1] He had certainly at least one in Alexander Mather. Wesley came to rely upon him increasingly as time went on: he was for many years his right hand man, assisting him in many difficulties and acting as the principal member of the select committee set up by Wesley to advise and help him. When John Wesley was at Newark in February 1787, " having a great cold and being so hoarse that I could not preach, I desired Mr. Mather to supply my place".[2] He became virtually Wesley's deputy and was probably regarded by him as his successor.

In 1784, John Wesley had taken a drastic step by ordaining two elders, and also Dr. Coke as superintendent for the growing work in America. The bishops would not help him, and he, ever practical, was compelled to act. " Church or no Church", he wrote to his brother Charles, " we must attend to the work of saving souls", and then he declared, " I firmly believe that I am a Scriptural *episcopos* as much as any man in England or in Europe".[3] Four years later, 5th August 1788, Alexander Mather was the first minister ordained by John Wesley for service at home.

In Marshall Claxton's well-known painting, " The Death Bed of Wesley " (exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1844), among the nineteen people present around the sick-bed are Alexander Mather and Thomas Rankin, another Scot of whom we are still to hear. Mather was one of the trustees of Wesley's will, and after the latter's death in 1791, he himself became President of the Methodist Conference in 1792. " His were the only shoulders that could possibly have worn Wesley's mantle", wrote the historians of Methodism.[4] And, as his contemporaries said at his funeral, when he died in 1800: " Since Mr. Wesley's death, nothing of any moment was done among us, but he was more or less concerned with. The preachers paid a great regard to his judgment".[5]

Thomas Rankin, whom we have already noted among the company privileged to share the intimacy of John Wesley's victorious dying, was born in 1738 into a pious home at Dunbar. When about twelve years of age, he was permitted to stay at a communion service; deeply moved, even to tears, he vowed that he would become a minister of the gospel.

[1] J. Wesley, *Letters*, vi, 272.

[2] J. Wesley, *Journal*, vii, 240.

[3] J. Wesley, *Letters*, vii, 238.

[4] *A New History of Methodism*, 1909, ed. Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, i, 385.

[5] *Early Methodist Preachers*, ii, 158-239.

A troop of dragoons being stationed in Dunbar, about a dozen of them, who had come under the influence of the Methodist, John Haime, whilst stationed in Germany, hired a room in which they met for prayer and Bible reading morning and evening. Curiosity led many to attend, including Thomas Rankin who was offended by their doctrine of Assurance. Visits from Methodist preachers followed, including one from a fellow-Scot, William Darney, who " gave a general disgust. I thought I had never heard such nonsense".

While staying at Leith, he heard George Whitefield preach in Edinburgh many times, and was himself converted ; returning to Dunbar, he talked with his own minister who told him : " My dear Tommy, I always loved you from a child, and I now love you more than ever : may God bless you, and keep you, and make you a blessing". From now on, he determined to be a minister of the Church of Scotland and began to prepare to go to the College in Edinburgh, but, for some unnamed reason, he was " disappointed in expectations of going to the college".

Because the door into the ministry seemed to be closed, he went on a trading venture to Charlestown in South Carolina, staying away from Scotland for about a year. Back in Dunbar, about 1759, he first met Alexander Mather, and " stood before him when he preached out of doors, and he leaned on my shoulder, which I thought a very great honour". Rankin then began to pay many visits to the Methodist societies in Northumberland and Durham, travelling and lodging with the itinerant preachers. At one place, a local preacher persuaded him to preach, and he was so ashamed that he could hardly look any of those present in the face afterwards. Discouragement subdued him, for after reading the Journals of Wesley and Whitefield, he had " expected that Divine power would attend the word in a most remarkable manner". Assuredly, thought he, " my time is not yet".

In the early summer of 1761, hearing that John Wesley was returning from Scotland, Rankin, with some friends, rode out from Newcastle to hear him preach at Morpeth. Owing to some misunderstanding about the time, they arrived when he was giving out the last hymn, but a tremendous impression was made. " And is this the man who has braved the winter storm and summer's sun, and run to and fro throughout Great Britain and Ireland, and has crossed the Atlantic Ocean to bring poor, wretched sinners to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ ? "

A deep attachment was formed that remained unbroken until Wesley's death, thirty-one years later ; he offered himself to Wesley as an itinerant preacher, being sent throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Wesley came to trust him more and more. William Darney, who had disgusted him at Dunbar, became his fellow worker: "he had been eccentric and Mr. Wesley thought I might be able to cure him". As Wesley had written, Nov. 1764, "either mend him or end him". All of which was of no avail, and Darney was dismissed. Writing to his brother Charles on 3rd August 1771, John Wesley declared, "I will not throw away T. Rankin on the people of London. He shall go where they know the value of him". A door of greater opportunity was soon to open.

In 1772, Captain Webb, one of the leaders of the rapidly growing Methodist societies in America, tired of the succession of young preachers in the colonies, crossed to England to persuade Wesley to come in person, or appoint some man of long experience and recognised standing. Thomas Rankin was made Superintendent, and chose George Shadford to accompany him; they sailed from Bristol on Good Friday, 9th April 1773, aboard the *Sally*, bound for Philadelphia. Almost two months later, they arrived to join the apostolic Francis Asbury. Shadford carried a heart-warming letter of good-bye from John Wesley: "I let you loose, George, on the great continent of America. Publish your message in the open face of the sun, and do all the good you can". Were better marching orders ever issued?

Things were not going too well in the societies, and discipline was slack; the new superintendent met his fellow preachers in conference and in plain speech insisted that "genuine Wesleyan discipline" be enforced. None the less "we parted in love". Misunderstandings developed between Rankin and Asbury, the former, ever outspoken, did not hide his opinions of slavery: "the dreadful sin of buying and selling the souls and bodies of the poor Africans, the sons and daughters of Ham, called aloud for the Divine punishment to Britain and her colonies".

But, above all, the rumblings of an approaching storm were growing louder. Rankin wrote: "a most portentous cloud hangs over these provinces". Lexington was fought in April 1775 and Bunkers' Hill two months later. Earlier, in March, Wesley had written to Rankin and all the other preachers about the critical situation: "it is your part to be peacemakers, to be loving and tender to all". No bitterness or anger, not even shyness or any coolness was to come between them.

He also wrote in June, 1775, to the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, declaring: "All my prejudices are against the Americans. For I am an High Churchman . . . bred in the highest notions of obedience". But, he went on, "is it common sense to use force toward the Americans? . . . You see, my Lord, whatever has been affirmed,

these men will not be frightened. And it seems they will not be conquered so easily as was at first imagined". A similar letter was also sent to Lord North.

Rankin continued to preach under growing difficulties. In August 1776, the year of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a company of Militia with their officers came into his service, but before he had finished preaching, they were " wiping their eyes". In the following year, most of the English preachers, with Rankin, decided to return home. " We parted bathed in tears, to meet no more in this world." By June 1778, Rankin was back in London and he laboured in this area until a few months before his death, 17th May 1810.

Mr. Benson, who had been his friend ever since the day they had ridden together to Newcastle in 1765, paid tribute to him for his " sincerity, steadiness and sobriety". Thomas Rankin was " a man who, in various and trying situations of life, both at home and abroad, maintained for upwards of fifty years an unblemished character".[1]

In addition to these three outstanding Scottish preachers in early Methodism, there were others such as *Duncan McCallum*, at Inverness, to whom Wesley wrote in July 1779, " Who can preach in Erse but you ? "[2] and *Alexander McNab*, one of " the best preachers".[3] In the controversy which raged in Edinburgh around Methodists preaching in Lady Glenorchy's chapel, the outcome of which was, that in April 1771, she " dismissed Mr. Wesley's preachers from my chapel", John Wesley censured McNab in a letter to Lady Maxwell. " He is not clear of blame in this. He is too warm and impatient of contradiction ; otherwise he must be lost to all common sense to preach against final perseverance in Scotland."[4] Some years later, January 1780, we find McNab in trouble, and actually disciplined for a little time because of his objections to Wesley's fixed rule, " you are to preach when and where I appoint". There are no denominational boundaries to the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum.*

It is of note too that some of Wesley's best evangelists were Irishmen of Scots descent, such as Adam Clarke, the great Biblical scholar and commentator, Henry Moore, Wesley's first biographer, and James McDonald, whose son became the father of Lady Burne-Jones, Lady Poynter, Mrs. Kipling, Mrs. Baldwin, and the distinguished Methodist preacher, the Rev. F. W. Macdonald, and among whose great-grandsons were Rudyard Kipling and Stanley Baldwin.

[1] *Early Methodist Preachers*, v, 135-217.

[2] J. Wesley, *Letters*, vi, 348. [3] *Ibid.*, v, 155. [4] *Ibid.*, v, 219.

One of the most remarkable lay-preachers associated with the Evangelical Revival in England was *William Darney*. We are fortunate in that John Wesley pressed, almost commanded, many of his preachers to submit biographical details for publication. The six volumes of the *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* tell, amongst others, the stories of Duncan Wright, Alexander Mather and Thomas Rankin, and are an indispensable quarry for any student of early Methodism. But there is no story by William Darney. John Wesley found it extremely difficult, and in fact, impossible to curb this adventurous spirit, and it would have required more than even Wesley's bidding for him to obey unless he were so disposed. Scraps of information in the accounts of his brethren ; items of news in letters ; and two publications of his own, viz., a book of verse and another of theology are our only sources. None the less, he was one of the earliest pioneers of field-preaching in Yorkshire and Lancashire.

His origins are completely obscure. Nehemiah Curnock, the editor of the Standard Edition of John Wesley's *Journal*, tells us that he was " a Scot of prodigious size, speaking a broad Scottish dialect, ' terrible to behold.' About 1742 he appeared suddenly in Rossendale preaching in Heap Barn".[1] It was here that he " produced a deep and lasting impression on the mind of Mr. Maden",[2] and this convert himself became a zealous and successful Methodist preacher.

Darney was a shoemaker and pedlar to trade, and Curnock assumes that he was probably converted under the preaching of James Robe at Kilsyth, although there is no evidence whatever to support this. In his own book, *The Fundamental Doctrines, etc., laid open to the meanest capacity . . . by William Darney*, a book of 304 pages in all, printed at Glasgow in 1755 by Archibald McLean, whom we have already noticed as a Baptist lay-preacher, he testified : " I can with a clear conscience, appeal unto God that these thirteen years I have preached, I never did, nor I trust, I never shall dab up people with untempered mortar " (p. 148). In the preface to hymn 162, in his collection of hymns, with its 104 verses describing the progress of the gospel in many separated parts of the country, we read : " In the Year of our Lord, 1742, after I had begun preaching (sometime when I was under great Affliction both of Body and Mind) I began to question my Call to the Ministry, altho' I had a clear Call in October before".

However he began, he was soon evangelising in Lancashire and Yorkshire, with amazing courage, energy and enthusiasm. Everett, in his *Wesleyan Methodism in Manchester and its vicinity*, speaks of his ardent

[1] J. Wesley, *Journal*, iii, 293, f.n.

[2] T. Newbigging, *History of the Forest of Rossendale*, p. 159.

temperament and arduous labours, his much persecution and imprisonment. " His wild notes, at first like a discordant tone, were preparatory to the richest harmony. There was a rich vein of evangelical truth on his preaching, looking occasionally to the Calvinistic side of the question . . . his popularity was not diminished by his frequently, at the close of his sermon, giving out an extemporary hymn, adapted to the subject upon which he had been discoursing." John Wesley would have raised a questioning eyebrow at this " occasionally", for he was in frequent controversy about Darney's insistence on Calvinistic preaching, and had often to discipline him[1]; as for the hymns, in one of his letters, they are damned with very faint praise.[2]

Darney disclaims being a poet in his preface, and says that " it was the general cry of the People of God . . . to have them put into the Press : For I generally sang them in the publick Congregation, as I composed them", and he warns others to beware of defaming what God has blessed. He goes on : " I have not borrowed one Verse from other Authors", and advises us to " take notice, that the first Hymn . . . is not made so proper for singing as for reading". It has 104 verses, and much of it is mere doggerel.

The Rev. William Grimshaw, one of the leaders of the Yorkshire Evangelical clergy, wrote to the Rev. John Gillies at Glasgow from Haworth, 19th July 1754 : " In the year 1745, William Darney, a Scotchman, who had been stirred up to preach the gospel . . . about Bradford, Manningham and divers other places a few miles east of my parish, came and preached in it. The Lord was with him indeed—I have cause to bless God for it".[3]

We know something of the cause for Grimshaw's gratitude. He had a strong dislike for Darney, his methods and doctrine, and actually attended the lay preachers' meeting to challenge his arguments, but was met by an appeal to the Scriptures, the Liturgy and the 39 articles of the Church of England, which he acknowledged as authoritative. He had a series of private meetings with Darney at night in some quarries on the moor ; convinced, he confessed the truth of Darney's doctrine of salvation by faith alone. He identified himself very closely with the preaching pedlar, giving out the hymns and praying also in his meetings. Onlookers jibed at him : " Mad Grimshaw is turned Scotch Will's clerk". He himself became a close associate of the Wesleys, and in 1749 was nominated by John as his successor to lead the Methodist Societies.

[1] *Vide* J. Wesley, *Letters*, iii, 187-189 ; iv, 163, 275, 288.
[2] *Ibid.*, viii, 138.
[3] J. Gillies, *Historical Collections*, Appendix.

One of the "New Sort of Preachers", as they were then described—for Methodism as a term was as yet little known—Darney preached in Lancashire and Yorkshire forming many societies. John Wesley was invited to visit them and reports on 4th May 1747: "At his earnest request I began examining those that are called W(illiam) D(arney)'s societies".[1] Darney however was determined to preach the Calvinistic doctrines of election and final perseverance which John Wesley would not permit (although such opinions might be held privately). There were many clashes, and the blunt-mannered Scot was often disciplined and removed from the list of preachers under Wesley's care and control. Again and again, his irrepressibility won him a fresh place among the travelling preachers and in 1768, Wesley wrote to arrange for Darney to preach in the Dunbar circuit, as "an old tried Scot".[2]

In his book, Darney says, "I have known by happy experience, that when I have been in the greatest extremity of sufferings . . . when I have preached in several places . . . when, at times, I did not expect to escape with my life . . . when the sons of wickedness hath been permitted to abuse my body, and tear my cloath's to pieces . . . I have found always most of God's presence. . . . I have at times tasted of the martyr's cup. . . . There was one time in particular, when the persecutors had taken, and tumbled me over head and ears, into a nasty stinking hole . . . full of mire and dirt with my enemies dancing and tumbling and pushing one another on the top of me: indeed, I was infinitely more happy in that stinking hole, nor what my enemies could have been on beds of down".[3]

This was no idle boast, for he bore obvious stigmata for the Lord whom he proclaimed. Preaching at Yeadon, Reynolds, the curate of Guiseley, came at the head of a large mob, who threw eggs in his face, pulled him down, dragged him from the house, and stamped on him. "The curate himself then thought it was enough, and bade them let him alone."[4] He was thrown into a pond at Accrington and his wig filled with filth. Finally he achieved the customary honour given to the intrepid and zealous evangelists of that day by antagonistic magistrates and bigotted clergy—he was thrown into prison at Thirsk around 1749.

In September 1749, Whitefield met Darney at Haworth and wrote: "Though he is seemingly unqualified, yet I meet with many that date their awakening from their first hearing him".[5]

[1] J. Wesley, *Journal*, iii, 293.
[2] J. Wesley, *Letters*, v, 75.
[3] W. Darney, *Fundamental Characteristics, etc.*, pp. 196-7.
[4] *Early Methodist Preachers*, i, 244.
[5] Everett, *Manchester, etc.*, p. 128.

Persecution attended him almost everywhere: at Osmotherly in North Yorkshire in 1752, he was daubed with tar and ornamented with feathers; at Barrowford, they stripped off his coat and dipped it in a dye-vat; in another place, they rode him through the deepest place of the river, one of the mob riding upon his back with a bridle about his head, and then they tied him in the middle of the stream; in Colne, they stripped off all his clothes, daubed him with mud and drove him naked through the town. Even after 1770, a mob attacked him when preaching at Almondbury, led by the clerk who incited the people to pull him down. This they did, tearing at his venerable white locks so that he fell heavily on the ground and was greatly injured, for he was very corpulent. He was then dragged into the street and kicked unmercifully with the iron-shod clogs of the people. It was with great difficulty that he escaped with his life. At this time he was a local preacher, for the Methodist Conference had decided against accredited preachers engaging in trade. But the same fire burned no matter what his status might be. He died probably in 1774 near to Rossendale where he had begun his preaching in England.

In his incessant and abundant labours, Darney would have found great satisfaction in the reply of another North Country Methodist lay preacher who was rebuked by the parish minister as being not qualified to preach. "Qualified! *You* say that? Why, without your gown you *dare* na, and without your book, you *could* na and without your pay, you *would* na. *And I do without all three.*"

Probably the strangest of all Scottish lay-preachers was a woman. The eighteenth century produced a small crop of female Messiahs, such as Ann Lee of Manchester, founder of the Shakers in America, and Joanna Southcott, from the South of England, with her strange prophecies. Scotland was not exempted. Elspeth Simpson, born in 1738 in Banffshire, became Mrs. Buchan and established a powerful influence over the Rev. Hugh White, minister of the Relief Church, Irvine. She was established in his home and preached there, first indoors, and eventually in a tent erected in his garden, claiming to be the "Woman clothed with the Sun", and dubbing White, the wonderful "Man Child".

Opposition in the burgh was furious and violent, and she was viciously assaulted. Her fantastic claims, which seem to us a farrago of nonsense, impressed Hugh White and his family, Patrick Hunter the burgh fiscal, Mr. Gibson a master-builder, and many others. After many disorders, she was expelled from the burgh by the magistrates in May 1784; the departure was so precipitate that among the 46 who made the exod u

with her, some never shut the doors of their homes, and "one left a washing on the green, another a cow bellowing at the crib without food".

And so this eighteenth century Moses, riding on a white pony and dressed in a scarlet cloak, smoking a black cutty pipe, led her followers into a new promised land. An attempt to follow apostolic communism was made at Closeburn ; one of the members was Jean Gardner, of whom Robert Burns wrote with some bitterness that she was " a belle fille whom I adored and who had pledged her soul to meet me on the field of matrimony". But marriage was forbidden to Mrs. Buchan's disciples.

Many and varied, and strangely fantastic were their adventures ; " Friend Mother " died in 1791, but prophesied that she would return to life certainly not later than 50 years afterwards. Circumstances combined to break up the community ; some emigrated to America, and a remnant moved into Galloway. Mrs. Buchan could hardly have imagined that anyone would survive for fifty years to put her prophecy to the test. Her most fanatical and devoted follower was Andrew Innes of Muthil ; by devious devices, he kept her body in his possession for half a century, and on 29th March, 1841, he spent the whole day with the dear remains of " Friend Mother", and kept his long vigil in vain. Because she did not rise, the only reason must have been his own unworthiness ; his last instructions were that he should be buried immediately above her so that she could not rise without him. Unswerving fidelity and a long life of devotedness merited a nobler cause, but it is some tribute to the power of the only Scottish female Messiah.

In the last decade of the century, the issue of Scottish lay preachers actually at work in Scotland was thrust before Church and people by the labours of the two brothers, Robert and James Haldane. Good men, inspired by the loftiest motives and driven by an " intolerable craving " to preach the saving gospel, they were compelled to work at a time of political tension, social suspicion and repressive legislation.

Henry Dundas (b. 1742), " Harry the Ninth", " the Manager of Scotland", had concentrated immense power into his own hands, and by the judicious control of patronage (there were 300 livings in the gift of the Crown in Scotland) had placed many " safe", and politically reliable ministers. The Moderate party prevailed in the councils of the Church of Scotland and set up a close alliance with the henchmen of Dundas, but, in doing so, antagonised many in their congregations. There was a marked change in the climate of public opinion, and ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity were being heard more often in conversation. The Declaration of Independence had been promulgated in 1776, and the French Revolution broke out in 1789.

Warneck, the historian of Christian missions, argues that these new and growing ideas about political freedom led inevitably to claims about other universal human rights, and Christians were able to assert that all men had the right to receive the Gospel. The modern missionary movement was begun both at home and overseas. The Baptist Missionary Society was organised in 1792, and Carey started to change the face of India; the London Missionary Society was formed three years later. Missionary associations were set up in Edinburgh, Glasgow and other Scottish towns.

At the memorable General Assembly of 1796, overtures were presented, advocating that the Church of Scotland should join in such work. Dr. Hill, the Moderate leader, hinted that such societies afforded opportunity for political agitation and David Boyle, an elder, accused them of using the very methods and language of seditious societies. In spite of John Erskine's plea, "Rax me that Bible", the overture was rejected. One of the arguments used against it had been: Why not look at home? Why send missionaries to foreign parts when there is so much ignorance, unbelief and immorality at our own doors? What had been merely a specious debating point became a bugle-blast to one who listened, James Haldane, and then to his brother Robert, laird of Airthrey, near Stirling.

Both had been brought up to the sea, although the elder, Robert, had retired early to manage his estate. The French Revolution had "awakened him from the sleep of spiritual death", and these democratic sympathies were later used to discredit all his efforts. Conversations with some local ministers and a pious stonemason on his estate led him to see that the only hope for the reign of happiness he sought was a revival of evangelical religion.

On 6th May, 1797, James preached his first sermon at Gilmerton; less than a year later Robert followed this example. On 11th January, 1798, the Haldanes, with other friends, formed "The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home". The twelve directors, all laymen, drew up their rules, stating their intention of employing itinerants, schoolmasters, etc., declaring "we do not consider ourselves as conferring ordination upon them, or appointing them to the pastoral office".[1] Subscriptions were invited from the public, and almost 300 preachers were sent out, but it was Robert who sold his estate and carried most of the financial load. It has been estimated that from 1799/1807 he expended between £50,000 to £60,000 on this work.

James and other lay preachers toured in 1798 with remarkable success

[1] A. Haldane, *Lives of Robert and James Haldane*, p. 178.

throughout the North of Scotland. He had already argued that "the writings of laymen in defence of Christianity had always been considered peculiarly important as there is less ground to suspect such men of interested motives. Strange, then, if we might not speak on subjects on which we might have written".[1] The novelty of lay-preaching by gentlemen in the ordinary coloured coat of the period startled those who were attracted by their unusual methods. Handbells or tuck of drum summoned all and sundry to town-halls, barns, market-places, church yards, and any other useful meeting place.

A storm of opposition, vocal and violent, arose, and it was claimed that this was intrusion into the various parishes. The brothers were both members of the Church of Scotland and were anxious to remain within her fold. Dr. William Porteous of Glasgow wrote about them to the Lord Advocate on January 24th, 1797: "Many of us have reason to believe that the whole of this missionary business grows from a democratical root", and a year later, February 21st, 1798, after complaining of "a loquacious manufacturer from Glasgow who preached and prayed with vehemence till a late hour", he added: "If any method could be fallen on to direct attention to the subject of lay preaching in a way that would not irritate, it would be a very seasonable service, but I am afraid the difficulties and perils of meeting a set of enthusiasts will prevent it".[2]

In 1799, the General Assembly passed an Act against "vagrant teachers". "Unqualified persons who intrude themselves into the ministry of the Word" were not to be countenanced. Under penalty, all ministers of the Church of Scotland were prohibited from employing such to preach. This Act was rescinded by a unanimous vote of the General Assembly of 1842 as "eminently discreditable to the Church of Scotland . . . amounting to nothing less than a hatred to the cause of evangelical truth . . . one of the blackest acts the Church of Scotland ever passed".

A pastoral letter was drawn up, presumed to be the work of Hugh Blair, 4000 copies were printed and circulated, and it was appointed to be read from the pulpit of every parish:

"It is much to be lamented that . . . there should of late have arisen among ourselves a set of men, whose proceedings threaten no small disorder in the country (The newly formed Society is then named) as if they had some special commission from Heaven . . . acting as universal itinerant teachers . . . intruding themselves into parishes . . . presuming to expound the Scriptures . . . connecting those schools with certain

[1] A. Haldane, *Lives of Robert and James Haldane*, pp. 144-5.
[2] *Laing MSS*, 500-501. (*Hist. MSS. Commission*, vol. 11, p. 644.)

secret meetings . . . pouring forth their loose harangues . . . as if they alone were possessed of some secret and novel method of bringing men to heaven . . . strange and self-authorised teachers of religion". After pleading with the readers and hearers not to forsake the church of their fathers, the pastoral letter ends, " Behave yourselves wisely in a perfect way ! "[1] And so wisdom was called in once again to damp down fires of enthusiasm.

The Anti-Burgher Synod also joined in this condemnation. In 1796, they objected to the newly formed missionary societies " on the ground that laymen, who had not been called, or set apart to bear rule in the church, were united along with ministers in judging of the qualifications of missionaries, and in sending them forth".[2] In 1798, they discussed lay preaching, objecting to such irregularities " as the singing of hymns . . . and permitting crowds of full grown persons to be present to listen to the address". It was unanimously declared that " lay-preaching has no warrant from the word of God " and none of their members must give any countenance to it. The following year, they deposed and excommunicated one of their most outstanding ministers, the Rev. George Cowie of Huntly, for listening to the preaching of James Haldane. With such a spirit of antagonism abroad, there is little wonder that the Haldane brothers felt impelled to leave the church of their fathers, and the movement they pioneered had to develop outside the main stream of the Church of Scotland. There were others too who caused momentary excitements, as the " French Prophets", the Quakers, and the Scots Independents, David Dale being one of their outstanding leaders.

It seems fairly clear that pious Scottish laymen have revealed from time to time gifts of preaching which have accomplished great good, but that this has been most noticeable outside their own country and their National Church. Among the probable reasons for this is the fact that in Scotland the parochial system, with a resident minister in every parish, was much more adequate than that in England, with the abuses of non-residence and pluralities. Also, the people of Scotland, with their just pride in an educated ministry, objected more to the fact that some lay-preachers were untrained than that they were not regularly ordained.

Whatever may be the root causes, it is evident that in Scotland there has been, and still is, a deep-rooted prejudice against lay-preaching, although it may be that sheer necessity will make inevitable the discarding of such objections. Principal W. M. McGregor, discussing the

[1] *Acts of the General Assembly*, 1538/1842, pp. 870-873.
[2] J. McKerrow, *History of the Secession Church*, p. 383.

problem of "A Valid Ministry" in his Baird Lectures, declared: "Here then are the elements of the problem—a clamorous need and a man with gift and message to whom, by ecclesiastical form, anything of title is denied; which is to be paramount—the timorous church order, hampered in its movements by regard for vested interests and proprieties, or the imperious sense within a man's heart, kindled by the love of Christ, that he *must* speak?"